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# Shelby - Utica News



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**Firefighters from the Utica Fire Department emerge from the Combined Regional Emergency Services Training flashover trailer in the parking lot of the former Sunnybrook Lanes in Sterling Heights May 25.**

Photo by Donna Agusti



# Firefighters receive flashover training

BY SARAH WOJCIK

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SHELBY TOWNSHIP/UTICA — Thanks to a grant, all 25 fire departments in Macomb County received classroom and hands-on training to recognize the signs of an impending flashover.

On May 25, Shelby Township and Utica firefighters were among those who endured a flashover simulation in a specially designed 50-foot trailer in the parking lot of the former Sunnybrook site in Sterling Heights.

A flashover occurs when all of the combustible particles in the air simultaneously ignite, sending a wave of fire that can reach temperatures of 2,000 degrees throughout an enclosure.

“A flashover is a very deadly situation for firefighters,” Utica Fire Chief Kevin Wilseck said. “If you get caught in a flashover, you’re lucky to survive it. (The simulation mirrors) conditions that

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# Training

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occur so you know when it's time to get out of there."

Shelby Township Fire Chief Jim Swinkowski said flashovers are a big part of structural firefighting nowadays, with structures being built with more and more synthetics, which burn hotter and faster than natural materials.

"They have a lower flashpoint than some of the more ordinary, natural materials, so it becomes more and more dangerous for us," Swinkowski said. "This is very specialized training and something you can't get all the time, because it's expensive."

Lenox Township Fire Chief Dennis Fouchia chairs the Macomb County Fire Chiefs Association's training committee. He said the project started in January and was made possible through \$44,000 in state funds from the Michigan Fireworks Safety Act.

Fouchia said training in-

cluded a minimum of two hours of classroom training provided by Oakland Community College instructors and 45 minutes to an hour inside the Combined Regional Emergency Services Training (CREST) flashover training trailer.

"At the completion of the program, we will have put over 800 firefighters through the program," he said. "(Macomb County) is the first in the state to ever attempt training of this magnitude. We have been very successful."

He said flashover training is invaluable because there is the potential for a flashover in every fire.

Matt Ratliff, training chief for the Sterling Heights Fire Department, said high temperature reads from thermal imaging cameras and thick yellow-brown smoke are the main indicators of an impending flashover.

In the training trailer, actual flashovers occur above the firefighters' heads. They wear protective covers over their helmets and use a hose to extinguish the initial flames before the wave spreads



Photo by Donna Agusti

**Utica firefighters Thomas Webb, left, and Davis Hovis, right, help extinguish the fire in the Combined Regional Emergency Services Training flashover trailer in the parking lot of the former Sunnybrook Lanes in Sterling Heights May 25.**

across the length of the trailer.

Ratliff said a lot of fire chiefs and administrative personnel who no longer fight blazes also opted to undergo the flashover training.

Home Depot donated oriented strand board, or engineered lumber similar to plywood, to line the inside of the trailer, and crews started a fire in a metal barrel in the

front of the trailer, Ratliff said.

Shawn Allen, a training officer with the Sterling Heights Fire Department, said firefighters' gear is designed to withstand 10 seconds of a flashover.

"You cook a turkey at 350 (degrees)," Allen said. "It's about 500-600 degrees in (the trailer). They're wearing full gear — hoods, helmets, everything tucked in. You can't have anything exposed."

He said approximately eight firefighters would go through two rotations in the trailer, so that each would get up to the front and be able to see the flashover.

After exiting the trailer, the firefighters headed to a hydration station, got their vitals taken and debriefed about the training.

"Some firefighters that have been through flashover training before said this is the best one they've done. It's very, very hot in there and the smoke is really thick," Ratliff said. "We've gotten all positive feedback."

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